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SIPDIS  
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG  
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AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EN](#)  
SUBJECT: Parliamentary President on Afghan Commitment, Russian Relations

CLASSIFIED BY: Marc Nordberg, Political/Economic Chief; REASON:  
1.4(B), (D)

Classified by Ambassador Michael Polt for reasons 1.4 B and D.

¶1. (C) Summary: In his introductory call on President of the Parliament Ene Ergma on December 14, Ambassador applauded Estonia's contribution in Afghanistan, asked for her views on relations with Russia, and praised Estonia's remarkable economic resilience. Ergma stressed that she fully understands the importance of the mission in Afghanistan and that Estonia will continue to do its part. Relations with Russia are strained, she said, since Russia's political elite is still not reconciled with "losing" the former Soviet Republics. Differences in interpreting recent history and Russian propaganda in the region further exacerbate relations. Last, Ergma gave credit to the Estonian people for allowing her government to maintain strong fiscal discipline without public protest. End summary.

Committed to Afghanistan

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador praised Estonia for its contributions in Afghanistan and expressed condolences for the recent wounding of an Estonian soldier in an engagement against insurgents in Helmand on December 12. Ergma replied that it is painful to lose soldiers, but as a NATO ally Estonia will remain in Afghanistan (note: on December 9 Parliament approved the extension of the Afghan mission through December 2010). She stressed that the terrorists active in Afghanistan are a threat to many countries, and that she appreciates the United States is in Afghanistan to fight a necessary war, not for its own gain (Ergma contrasted this situation with the Russian invasion of Chechnya).

Russia: Like the People, Not the Government

¶3. (C) Ergma, who lived in Moscow for 20 years, stated that she liked the Russian people, but that Russia's political elite still dreams of empire and keenly feels the "loss" of the Baltic States, Ukraine and Moldova. Among other forms of pressure Russia is using energy as a means to re-exert control over former Soviet territory. She worries that the "KGB" operates without any political or civil

checks on its power, and that Estonia and Russia have very different interpretations of World War II. Ergma conceded that Russia liberated Estonia, but complained they then forgot to go home afterwards. It is painful when Russians demand that Estonia be thankful for this liberation, especially since Ergma's father, like many other Estonians, was one of many deported to Siberia, then forced to fight in the Red Army.

¶4. (C) She further maintained that the Russian government is building barriers between Estonians and Russians in Estonia through Kremlin-controlled television (RTR and the First Baltic Channel). These channels regularly vilify Estonia. That said, Ergma believes the GOE needs to make stronger efforts to make ethnic Russians feel part of Estonian society, while knowledge of the Estonian language has to remain an essential element of integration. The Ambassador noted that in the U.S., English is our language for historical and pragmatic reasons, and not because it is mandated by law. Ergma provided the counter example of the Netherlands, which has a liberal language policy and as a result now has a large mass of people that do not speak Dutch and do not fit into society. She further argued that Russian-speakers in Estonia need to learn Estonian to find a good job, just as she had to learn Russian to work in Moscow.

Economics: Thank the Estonian People for Sacrifices

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¶5. (SBU) Responding to Ambassador's compliments on the GOE's extraordinary fiscal discipline, Ergma said the Estonian people understand that sacrifices are needed to survive and prosper. Even with the GOE and private business cutting salaries, Estonians are not protesting. She admitted that the GOE made some mistakes in the boom years, such as misinterpreting Estonia's real estate bubble as real growth, but in general the GOE saved money and managed to preserve key entitlements, such as pensions. Ergma stated that Estonia needs to work still to retrain the unemployed and to maintain high educational standards, but that Estonia has extreme challenges as a small state with a small government budget. Partly in jest she equated the Estonian state budget with that of Harvard University (note: in actuality the GOE's 2010 budget was roughly 8.5 billion USD, compared to Harvard's 3.5 billion USD).

¶6. (C) Comment: As president of Parliament, Ergma fulfills a largely functional role enforcing parliamentary rules. She is not a major power in her party, but she is a typically thoughtful Estonian interlocutor, very supportive of the U.S., and does maintain influence both personally and through her respected parliamentary position.

POLT